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COMMUNICATIONS.

AN ESSAY.

The Evil Incident to the Customary Mode of Receiving Members into Our Churches, and the Remedy Therefor.

BY MAT. LTON.

[This Essay was read before the Ministers' and Deacons' Meeting, at the session including the fifth Sunday in June last, held at Winona, and at their request, is here condensed for publication in the Record, in two numbers.]

so 1.

The common practice at our Saturday monthly church meetings, is to open the door regularly for the reception of members, either by letter or its equivalent, or by relation of experience and baptism. Let us speak first of the latter class.

It is notorious that there are many unregenerate persons in our churches. Some are drunkards, some treat and are treated at tippling shops, and are fast learning the way to the drunkard's grave and the drunkard's hell. When they choose they can make some kind of acknowledgment of having been "overtaken" by liquor, when the church has life enough to notice the matter, and after being of course, forgiven, they go on when they choose, and enjoy the pleasure of being "overtaken" again. Some Baptists buy lottery tickets, visit the circus, the theatre, and other foolish and wicked shows, with their families, in some cases, no doubt, borrowing money for the purpose, and leaving former debts unpaid, and their homes not provided with the comforts of life. Some engage in dancing and card-playing, while others have worldly policies of those kinds in their houses, and expect in many cases sending their children to dancing schools. There are church members, however, who go to places of such worldly amusement, holding a sort of religious reservation that they will look on, but not engage in, the activity. Such professors ought to remember that they show they have a worldly heart, and are kept back from entering, not by the love of God, but by a selfish fear of punishment. I presume they do not often read the first verse of the first Psalm, for they cannot say that they "walk not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful." Besides other kinds of wickedness, some church members yield themselves up to the violence of evil passions, worshipping their passions, craving more, and confining themselves to the world; and there is not enough of faithfulness, but in many of our churches, to tell themselves of the faithful members.

These wicked persons were not born in the church, nor introduced by infant baptism, nor educated into membership and transplanted from our Sunday schools, as some people foolishly imagine. The churches of Christ recognize no such modes of adding to their membership; but these delinquents come in by their own declaration of repentance and faith in Christ and baptism, in professed obedience to His command. There must be some defect in the manner of receiving these members. Let us look at the common mode of proceeding:

When the usual monthly invitation is extended, most frequently, no one comes, and then, there is a natural feeling that some, or all, are more or less disappointed. This might be avoided, simply by ascertaining beforehand whether there were any present who probably ought to join the church; if none, then omit that item, and pass on to other business. But, occasionally some do answer the invitation. Of these, we will suppose one class the members are satisfied ought to be received; another, they believe, ought not; and a third, they know almost nothing of. The first are received, as they ought to be; the second, no one wishes to vote for, but for fear of hurting somebody's feelings, they too, are received; and afterwards, some, who voted for them by not voting against them, are greatly scandalized, because "they"—those who acted openly and decidedly—were so blind as to receive such and such persons into the church. The third class, though their fitness or unfitness is not known, are received of course, because people think it charitable to allow to others the benefit of a doubt. In this way, many persons unfit for church membership, without doubt, received and baptized.

no 2.

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extreme to the other. The old fashion was, I suppose, in most cases, a long, tedious, painful, perplexing, discouraging inquisition, inflicted on the tender-hearted novice, all aglow with love and gratitude to God, and knowing little else than like Peter to say, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." This practice required him, or her, some young girl, for instance, to solve, on the spot, in the midst of her tears, old theological knots, that had been puzzling the brains of the orthodox since the days of John Knox, and to define with precision such riddles, it may be, as these: Whether it would be a sin for her not to be willing to go to hell, if it was God's sovereign pleasure to send her there; whether she believed God would have heard her prayer for salvation, before he communicated his electing love to her heart; whether it would be possible for her now to cease to love God; and if not, whether that was consistent with the doctrine of free agency; and finally, how she reconciled free agency with the doctrine of eternal predestination. Now, the fashion is, to go to the other extreme; and when the young candidates of both sexes and various degrees of intelligence are before you, you ask them flat, most likely to state any thing of their own motion, but you propound such questions as involve the few things essential to be known, as, whether they have truly repented of their sins, and whether they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; and about how long since they had such experience, etc.; whether they believe God has forgiven their sins; and whether they believe it to be their duty, and feel it to be their pleasure, to be baptized, and unite themselves with the people of God for life. All this is excellent, if the candidates would make a statement of it; but when nearly all he or she says "yes," or "no," it requires great liberality in the interpretation of language to say, such a one was, on a relation of experience, received, or recognized as a suitable subject, for baptism.

On one noted occasion, some years ago, I officiated with another minister in the reception of quite a number. I think about twenty, of whom not one, that I remember, did more than briefly answer a few questions; and as I know many, if not the most, of these questions are made without of any ulterior intention, what lawyers call leading questions; that is, questions so framed as to suggest the kind of answers deemed appropriate for unregenerate persons to give; and if the candidate be sufficiently intelligent, such answers are generally given. And I particularly remember that while extremely little was said by two or more in reply to my questions, one of the candidates answered not one word, even in the faintest whisper that I could perceive (and my hearing is personally good). Yet this one was received, and, some what remarkable, remains yet creditably in the church, while some of the others have been excluded. But it would be better if we could approach nearer to certainty in our examinations.

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lowering the dignity of his office, or of upstaging his consecration. I assume that, as a general rule, the preacher's pay corresponds with his work. That church that can give a preacher employment all his time, can, and usually does, pay accordingly. A pastor that preaches to a church every Sunday, holds a prayer meeting in the week, holds a supervision over the Sunday-school, and does the other pastoral work that he should, has need of all the rest he can get, and deserves a full support at the hands of the church. But where one, or even four churches receive less than one-third of the pastor's time (when he goes on Saturday, returns home Sunday evening, holds no prayer meetings, is seldom at the Sunday-school, and does little or no pastoral labor, the churches should not be censured for a failure to pay him for his full time. Then, on the other hand, if these churches are only able to do this much, but leave their pastor to control of two-thirds of his time, he is to be censured, or to have his consecration of heart doubted, because he devoted some of his spare time to secular business for an increase of his means of support? Nay, verily. The preacher should devote some time to study; yet "too much study is a weariness to the flesh." There is a correct medium ground somewhere, and happy is he who finds it.

Some writer in the Record (and others have endorsed him) has gone to the extreme of saying that the secularized, or partly secularized, preachers should get out of the way of those who are consecrated. That means, as I understand, to give up the best-paying churches to those who depend entirely on their salaries for a living. The idea has seemed to be taking shape, that a consecrated minister is distinguished from others especially by the fact that he does not work. That it means one who wraps his ministerial robes about him, perches himself upon the exalted dignity of his office, and looks down on honest labor as a degrading employment.

The extreme tendency of the advocates of a consecrated ministry is having a bad effect upon the old preacher or country preacher. Many of these have done nobly in their respective spheres, and are still filling the places that only such men are adapted to. The Editor of the Record once an apt illustration, some weeks ago, when he said something like this: "You can't grab with a razor, nor can you share with a grub-bug-hoe; yet both are useful and indispensable tools." If God calls men of different talents, and of various degrees of education, to preach His gospel, He has provided a sphere in which each can work to profit; and we should be cautious, therefore, whom we offend. Because education is a good thing, and self-consecration is a good thing—and we need more of both—it need not be said in such a way as to make those feel sore and discouraged, who have borne the burden and heat of the day, by "brushing it" among the hills and hollows, going through all kinds of weather, and in all open houses, holding up the gospel banner and faithfully preaching Christ to a sinful world. Their works follow them; and, when they go to their final reward, I doubt not it will be said of them: "They have done what they could." In conclusion, I say, give us consecrated ministers, but let it be the consecration of the heart.

J. M. MARTIN.

CORINTH, MISS.

What Shall We Do About It?

For several weeks we have been writing articles about "Catholicism in New Orleans," and we had an object in view all the while. In the first place, we desired to inform the readers of the Record of the magnitude and nature of the work that is being done by the Romanists in this city, and enlist the sympathy of the Mississippi Baptists in behalf of the many dying souls in our midst.

We have shown, from reliable authority, that about five out of every eight persons are Romanists; and, of the two hundred and forty thousand inhabitants, there are only two hundred and fifty Baptists who are connected with either white church here. The Catholic church has a nominal membership of two hundred and fifty-four. In the first church there are one hundred and five, giving a total of three hundred and fifty-nine members on the rolls. But there are many of these who are non-residents, or seldom visit the churches. Therefore we believe that two hundred and fifty is an outside figure; or one Baptist to every nine hundred and sixty inhabitants.

It is true that the Catholic church has a handsome building, but there is a debt on it amounting to about \$10,000. There are some noble, self-sacrificing, good Christians among her number, who would gladly sacrifice more for her prosperity and the removal of the burden of debt, but, with the hard, dull times pressing down upon them, they find it quite difficult to meet the current expenses just now. They have a good leader in Eld. N. W. Wilson, D. D., and we perceive a growth of spirituality under his ministrations.

The Baptists of Texas seem to be well provided with Colleges, both in fact and in prospect. They have Baylor University in the South, presided over by the well known Wm. Carey Crane, D. D., Waco University in Central Texas, under the direction of the no less celebrated K. C. Barleson, D. D., and the Dallas College recently organized in the North and under the Presidency of one of Texas' most able and prominent pastors, G. W. Rogers, D. D. Then, in addition, they have an Educational Commission charged with the duty of raising an endowment of \$300,000 with which to found a Grand Central Institution of higher learning. This endowment is represented by brethren Law, Lick and others. We had a fine speech from Dr. Law, concerning his work. Among the visitors at the General Association were the genial and handsome O. C. Pope, of the Health Brothers Howard and Law, of the Texas State Convention; W. O. Bailey and Surgeons, of the East Texas Convention; J. B. Hardwick, of Kansas, and the writer.

On account of having to leave Fort Worth on Monday morning I did not see the total eclipse of the sun. But I was far enough west at 3 o'clock to have a magnificent view, amounting almost to totality, only the slightest thread of light was visible. I am informed this view was splendid at Fort Worth. Scientists were there to make observations, and no doubt some old theories will be upset. "God only is great," and His works declare His immutability.

J. A. H.

"Good Friday"

Life is made up of clouds and sunshine, night and morning, and there are dark and bright days in the life of every individual. Sometimes, we are on the mountain-tops, where all is light and gladness. At such times we can feel the nearness of Heaven and the insignificance of all earthly things. We are in love with every body, and wish to draw them up to our level, that they, too, may behold the beauty of holiness, and feel with us, that "out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined."

Again, we sink down in the valleys surrounded by the blinding mists, and we can hear only the dismal hum of what seems to us a heartless world. We can see no beauty, nor loveliness, in the things around us. We look, even upon our dearest friends, with jaundiced eyes, and "evil surmises" eclipse all sunlight of the soul. These are dark days.

Such were my feelings during the first days of our meeting at Dry Creek. The very spirit of heaviness possessed me. I was a hungry sheep, too weak and heavily laden, myself, to take any interest in the perishing souls around me. My own soul was longing—yes, even fainting—for "the cup of cold water"—or, even the crumbs from the Master's table. I thought would satisfy me. This feeling continued for days, the gloom still deepening, until Thursday, I was enveloped in thick darkness.

Most faithfully had the dear old father in Israel, Bro. Melvin, and our untiring pastor, Bro. M. T. Martin, preached the word, and I could see joy beaming on many faces as they gladly received it, but, somehow, my soul was disquieted within me, and I felt there was "not a crust—not a crumb"—for me. Strange experience this, for a Christian! Strange, that one, whose life, like a blank sheet, is given into the Savior's hands to be filled up according to His own will, could ever become so discouraged. There must be something wrong. Sin lieth at the door, at my own door, I thought, as I tossed restlessly upon my pillow Thursday night and prayed for comfort. After a rigid self-examination, I found the evil in my own heart. I found a principle of selfishness there which must be laid aside before rest could enter. After considerable struggling, I became willing to mortify self, and give my tears and prayers, henceforth, for lost souls. This was my preparation for "Good Friday."

On Friday morning, with that beautiful Psalm, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts," in my mind, and with the firm resolve, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the house of wickedness," I repaired to the church, entirely freed from all gloomy feelings. I felt confident, that God who had given the command, "Feed my sheep," would not suffer any of His own to go unfed. The day, August 2nd, was "Good Friday," indeed, to me—the happiest day of my life—because I had the most direct assurance that God had blessed me, "even me," as never before. When the old brother announced his subject, "The Gospel of Christ," and said the field was so varied and exhaustless that he hardly knew which fruit to pluck as the proper food for his hearers, on this particular day, how my heart thrilled with thankfulness, as he passed into the walks I loved, leading to the green pastures and still waters of peace. Again in the evening, Bro. Martin's discourse was especially suited to quiet the fears of the depressed—to bring the desolate nearer to God and show His tender care for them. Friday was a good day for both priests and people, and "much people was added unto the Lord," as the result of that "sacred day's work for the Lord," on "Good Friday."

I have recorded this little bit of my own experience for the good of the despondent. One pastor says, it is only when we turn aside from the right way that darkness comes upon us, and this is true. If ever you have such gloomy feelings as I have described, Christians, begin to search your own hearts—examine yourselves—purge out the old leaven, and you will find, that each succeeding day for you, will be like my "Good Friday."

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Mrs. N. M. Morrison, Spring River, Miss., Aug. 7, 1878.

Christian Effort.

A NARRATIVE.

As the Master has work for all His servants, it is our duty to look around us and see what we can find to do, and when we find any work to do, go forward and do it.

One grand object to be accomplished through the instrumentality of the church is the evangelization of the world; and one way of advancing that work is for individual Christians to make efforts for the conversion of sinners around them, praying God to bless and sanctify all efforts made. But I do not propose to go into a lengthened argument to establish my conclusions on this subject, now, as I have a shorter method, more readily understood by some persons, I appeal to a fact illustrating the value of Christian effort.

When the late war broke out two men went, to conceal their identity, we will call B, and D, were living very near each other and were close friends. D was an earnest Christian, but B, although the son of Christian parents, was still "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." D had affectionately called his friend's attention to his soul's eternal welfare, but B was careless and seemed to feel no interest in the subject. While B was in this state of mind he enlisted in the Confederate army, and on his departure requested D, to watch over his family and assist them when necessary.

While the two friends were thus separated D's interest in his friends' eternal welfare did not abate, but rather increased, and finally he decided to make another effort for his awakening.

He sat down and wrote out one of the Psalms, designing his hand writing the best he could. I think the Psalm was the thirty-fifth, and giving no name, date or place, directed it to B, and had it mailed at a distant village. D hoped that absence from home, the dangers of his position, and the solemn events transpiring around B, might, in the providence of God, render him more easily impressed by any warning he might receive.

B received the Psalm with wonder and astonishment. He was utterly unable to imagine who at that village should take so deep an interest in his welfare. The singular circumstances and strange mystery surrounding the warning strongly drew his attention to it, and the spirit of God fastened conviction upon him. He became thoroughly awakened, but the struggle was neither short nor slight. It went on till the close of the war, and it was some years after the surrender before the path of duty became clear to B; and all these years he remained enveloped in mystery and perplexity concerning that warning letter, and though he had conversed with D on the subject, yet D chose not to enlighten him as yet.

At last the struggle in B's mind ended, he could hold out no longer; the path of duty became clear, and grace was given him to walk in it. While on his way to the Baptist church in company with D, he made known his intention to offer himself to the church that day. D then cleared up the mystery and explained the strange circumstances. B was received and baptized into the fellowship of the church, and is to-day an orderly, zealous, useful, and intelligent member of that church.

This is no fiction. I can vouch for the truth of the story, if I have not unconsciously colored it myself. I

